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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PREF](#) [CH](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: PRC/ETHIOPIA: MFA DETAILS PRC RESPONSE TO APRIL 24
ATTACK ON OIL FACILITY

REF: ADDIS ABABA 1308

Classified By: Deputy Political Minister Counselor Robert Griffiths. R
easons: 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

1. (C) China was shocked "top to bottom" by the April 24 dawn attack by some 200 Ogden National Liberation Front (ONLF) rebels on a Chinese oil facility near the Somali border in the Ogaden region, MFA Deputy Division Director Zhou Haihong told us on May 16. Describing the incident as "totally unexpected," Zhou said China's leadership responded immediately by dispatching a Task Force to Ethiopia to convey PRC concerns, secure the release of kidnapped Chinese nationals and provide Consular services to survivors. Prime Minister Meles met with the PRC Task Force and agreed to bolster security at PRC-affiliated facilities in Ethiopia. The PRC had no contact with the ONLF and worked through the International Committee of the Red Cross for the release of kidnapped Chinese nationals. PRC petroleum activities in the Ogaden region have been suspended indefinitely but other PRC trade and investment activities in Ethiopia will not be disrupted by the attack. The PRC intends to continue its "non-interference" policy in internal affairs of African countries and distance itself from the dispute between the Ethiopian Government and the ONLF. China does not believe Eritrea seeks to destabilize Ethiopia by proxy through non-state actors in Ethiopia or Somalia and the PRC maintains excellent relations with both Ethiopia and Eritrea, Zhou said. End Summary.

China Shocked By Attack

2. (C) China was shocked "top to bottom" by the April 24 dawn attack by some 200 Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) rebels on a Chinese oil facility near the Somali border in the Ogaden region, Zhou said. Zhou provided Poloff a readout on May 16 of the incident and its aftermath. Zhou said nine Chinese nationals were among the seventy-five dead and seven Chinese nationals were kidnapped but later returned safely. The attack was "totally unexpected." China understood there

were tensions between the Ethiopian Government and rebels in the Ogaden, but had paid "little attention" to the security situation prior to the attack. President Hu Jintao and PRC leadership "attached great importance" to the events. The PRC Government's "emergency reaction system turned on," with PRC leadership immediately instructing all "concerned departments" to address the crisis.

Petroleum Activities Curtailed

13. (C) Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau (ZPEB) (the affected Chinese oil company) has suspended operations at the attacked facility, Zhou said, adding that Chinese petroleum sector and all other PRC trade and investment-related activities will be curtailed in the Ogaden region indefinitely. Investments in telecommunications and infrastructure development and other sectors in non-disputed regions will not be disrupted. China enjoys excellent overall economic relations with Ethiopia, Zhou said.

Task Force Dispatched

14. (C) The afternoon of April 24, Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun convened a meeting at the MFA between officials from the MFA, ZPEB, Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) (MOFCOM controls the purse strings for development aid and handles Africa trade and investment), the Civil Aviation Administration (brought in to arrange charter flights), Ministry of Public Security and other relevant agencies. The Communist Party's International Department was not involved because the events did not concern "party affairs" and the People's Liberation

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Army (PLA) did not participate because Africa is "too far off," Zhou said, adding that the situation required a diplomatic solution through contact with Ethiopia and "other governments." At the meeting, the PRC decided to dispatch a MOFCOM-led Task Force to Ethiopia. The Task Force arrived in Addis Ababa via charter plane late April 25. NOTE: Zhou did not attend the MFA meeting because he was in Kenya at the time, accompanying Jia Qinglin, Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. He flew to Ethiopia directly and met the Task Force at the airport. End Note.

15. (C) The Task Force's priorities were to rescue the kidnapped workers and deal with the aftermath of the attack, including comforting the survivors and repatriating the bodies of the deceased. Upon arrival in Ethiopia, the Task Force visited Chinese nationals who survived the attack to convey Chinese leadership's sympathy and to provide Consular services. The Task Force subsequently met Prime Minister Meles to request help from the Ethiopian Government to rescue the seven kidnapped Chinese nationals and to urge the Ethiopian Government to tighten security at other significant facilities owned or operated by Chinese firms. The Ethiopians pledged to "try their best." Chinese authorities remain baffled as to why the ONLF attacked this particular facility as a number of other Chinese assets were far more vulnerable, Zhou said.

Unique Use of ICRC Assistance

16. (C) Once PRC concerns were conveyed, the PRC left it to the Ethiopian Government to take the lead on resolving the situation, Zhou said, stressing the PRC had no contact with the rebels and could only ascertain the rebels' intentions from the rebels' public statements. When the rebels indicated that they would release the kidnapped Chinese workers to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the PRC asked the Red Cross to contact the rebels and convey PRC concerns for the welfare of the Chinese nationals. The PRC also contacted "tribal elders" in the region for

help, Zhou said, as it does similarly in the Niger Delta. The PRC has not previously worked through the ICRC to resolve kidnappings, Zhou added. The rebels ultimately released the kidnapped workers to the ICRC, which turned them over to the PRC Task Force.

"Non-Interference" To Continue

17. (C) In the wake of the attack, Zhou said China will continue its strict policy of non-interference in Ethiopia's internal affairs. China cooperates with African governments to assist their development for the benefit of common people and does not side with government or rebel forces in internal struggles, Zhou said. Poloff noted that the ONLF likely views China's investments in the Ogaden region as "interference" because the benefits accrue to the Ethiopian Government. Zhou said that the PRC Government has yet to formulate a policy response to circumstances where China's investments are labeled by rebels or non-state actors. China, like the United States, believes stability and development are mutually reinforcing, Zhou said, acknowledging that as China's economic power grows, the world will be "more dangerous for overseas Chinese nationals and Chinese interests." China has a responsibility to protect its overseas nationals, Zhou added.

18. (C) At present, China has no comprehensive plan to bolster Africa's regional security architecture, Zhou said, but China will likely continue to participate in specific peacekeeping operations, such as in Liberia and Sudan. Without indicating whether attacks such as this will drive China closer to common international positions on African regional security, Zhou noted that China has enjoyed closer cooperation with the United States on Africa through the Sub-dialogue mechanism. The PRC deeply appreciated United States Embassy Addis

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Ababa's assistance and expression of condolences in the wake of the attacks, Zhou said.

PRC Views On Ethiopia, Somalia

19. (C) The PRC views Ethiopia as generally peaceful and stable, Zhou said. Tensions with Eritrea and Ethiopia's involvement in Somalia are potentially destabilizing factors, but China does not view them as major threats to Ethiopia's internal stability at present. Regarding Somalia, Zhou said China, which officially recognizes the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), shares our objective to encourage the TFG to bridge clan differences and work toward national reconciliation. Zhou stressed China has no contact with Islamists or other non-TFG actors in Somalia. China acknowledges that some foreign fighters or agents are in Somalia, but does not believe their numbers to be significant, Zhou said. China believes a national reconciliation conference is in Somalia's best interest but at present China has no funds earmarked to support the African Union Mission in Somalia or a Somali national reconciliation conference. China is willing to contribute humanitarian aid to Somalia, including food, medicine, clothes and shelter materials should stability and security improve, Zhou said, noting that the threat of pirates forestalls "even deliveries of aid by boat."

PRC: Eritrea Not Arming Insurgents

110. (C) The PRC does not believe the Ethiopian-Eritrean border dispute will devolve again into war, Zhou said. China maintains neutrality in the dispute and has "excellent" relations with both countries. China supports peaceful resolution of the border tensions through negotiation and dialogue. Zhou said that China does not believe Eritrea is supplying weapons to insurgent groups in Somalia or Ethiopia

or otherwise trying to destabilize Ethiopia by proxy.

Biographical Note: Zhou Haihong

11. (C) Zhou Haihong said he considers himself an Africanist, having spent his entire career in the MFA's African Affairs Department. He speaks fluent English. He said he studied African Affairs in college and wrote a thesis on Ethiopia's struggle against Italy during World War II. From 1996 to 2000, he served at the PRC Embassy in Gabarone, before returning to Beijing. He joined the First Division (East Africa) as Deputy Division Director earlier this year, replacing Zhang Bin (who transferred to the Sixth Division (South Africa)).

RANDT